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SUBJECT: PRT SALAH AD DIN: UN STEPS UP EFFORTS IN SAMARRA
BUT LOCALS SEE FEW BENEFITS

Classified By: PRT Salah ad Din Team Leader Rick Bell for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Salah ad Din reporting cable.

¶2. (C) Summary. The United Nations (UN) has dramatically increased its activity in Samarra over the last several months. The main focus of UN activities in Samarra has been on reconstruction of the Golden Mosque. While the increased activity is welcome, many Samarrans say that UN and GoI efforts revolve solely around Golden Mosque (a Shia shrine in a Sunni town), providing no tangible improvements in the quality of life for the residents of that city. End Summary.

Golden Mosque Key UN Focus

¶3. (C) The United Nations, through UNESCO, UNDP and UNOPS, has dramatically stepped up its efforts in the city of Samarra. The increased UN efforts have been enhanced by close cooperation and coordination with the Mayor of Samarra, Chairman of the Iraqi High Commission for Restoration of the Al Askari (aka Golden) Mosque and the Samarra PRT office. Until recently the only UN project in Samarra was a high profile engineering study and initial site clearing efforts which were necessary to begin renovation of the Mosque. The restoration of the Mosque, a World Heritage Site, is supported by the population of Samarra. UNESCO will manage the restoration, with funding from GoI and oversight by the High Commission for the Restoration of the Al Askari Mosque, which reports directly to Prime Minister Maliki. A Turkish engineering company, Ukle, completed site and engineering studies in May and a yet-to-be-selected Iraqi company will begin full reconstruction efforts, which will take up to five years to complete.

¶4. (C) The UN is undertaking a number of other initiatives in the Samarra. The UNDP has received \$1.2 million in donor funds to implement three projects in Samarra district: refurbishment and expansion of the General Hospital; installation of a water treatment unit; and construction of a major park and family recreation area for the Al Moatasem sub-district. In addition, donor funding is supporting the development of a Samarra recovery and development plan. This effort is underway and will allow a broad cross-section of civic, private-sector, security, and provincial leaders to provide input in developing what will become the guiding document for future development of the city and future international donor aid. The PRT is working closely with UNDP to ensure the success of the effort.

Locals Wonder About the Mosque and How the City Gets Fixed

¶5. (C) The residents of Samarra, nearly all Sunni, complain that all the attention is focused on the Shia Mosque. The recent announcement by Prime Minister Maliki of \$63 million for Mosque reconstruction, with no money for other needs in Samarra, confirmed the perception of residents that the only interest the Shia-led GoI had in Sunni Samarra was in the

Shia Mosque. This announcement came at a time when security in the city had improved immeasurably, due to the support of residents for the efforts of Iraqi Security and Coalition Forces. At the same time, that support and the resulting improvements in security have not yielded improvements in essential services. Almost no money from the Provincial budget has reached the city, despite constant requests from the PRT and Coalition Forces to Provincial officials to get projects started.

¶6. (C) The only significant efforts outside of the Mosque are those related to \$11 million in DFI funds. Currently held by the GoI, those funds have been the subject of squabbling between the GoI and the Province since 2006. The largest share of those funds will go towards the construction of five municipal buildings. An engineering and design contract for those projects has been signed, and funds are available for the actual construction, which will begin later this year. However, Provincial leaders are unhappy that this money is being spent without their input, which was envisaged under the initial agreement on DFI spending.

¶7. (C) Samarra residents receive no official information on what happens inside the Golden Mosque reconstruction zone, leaving speculation and rumor to fill the gap. One rumor often heard by the PRT and by the Mayor and City Council President is that Iran is directly involved in the rebuilding of the Mosque. Despite assurances from Haq al-Hakim, Chairman of the Iraqi High Commission for Restoration of the Al Askari Mosque, and Sheik Sohail Dawood (a former resident of Samarra and now Principal Consultant to UNESCO) to the contrary, the lack of visible focus on meeting the needs of

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the population undermines those denials.

¶8. (C) More problematic is that there is no systematic effort to examine and improve the process that would deliver on these promises. While the Province has begun in earnest to integrate its capital-planning strategy with its vision for the Province, there is no complementary strategy for improving the ability of provincial and local ministry representatives to actually execute the projects envisioned in the strategy. Ministries have significant challenges at the Baghdad level that limit their ability to train and supervise their provincial and local employees.

¶9. (C) Some steps have been made to rectify this information gap. The recent incorporation of Samarrans working on rubble-removal teams inside the Mosque compound (the Mosque is surrounded by T-walls) has helped. The teams are made up of 60-75 workers from cities throughout Iraq rotated bi-weekly to work at the site. The reconstruction efforts now also include a permanent team of equipment operators from Samarra.

¶10. (C) Comment: We cannot overstate the need for the overwhelmingly Sunni residents to feel that the GoI is focused on meeting their needs as well as rebuilding the Mosque. UN efforts on the Mosque rebuilding are extremely welcome and a key piece of stabilizing the city. However, an overcautious approach on rebuilding in other parts of the city, based on security perceptions from six months ago, has the potential to inflame the population. The most high-impact target for their rage would be the Mosque itself.

Another incident at the Mosque would pose the risk of a resurgence of the sectarian violence that engulfed the country after the bombings in 2006. UNESCO, to its credit, is working with CF and the PRT to place six engineers in the PRT offices at Patrol Base Olsen in Samarra. The UN should be encouraged to quickly move forward with these efforts, recognizing that security has greatly improved. The PRT and CF continue to push provincial officials who are reluctant to execute projects from the 2008 budget because they feel that they have been shut out of GoI efforts and because Samarra has no Provincial Council members to advocate on the

Samarra, s behalf. All those with an interest in Samarra must act quickly, lest the Samarran public lose patience and withdraw its support from the authorities.

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